



2 FREE  
HOURS

Outdoor Wireless  
DOWNTOWN



## post-gazette**NOW** BUSINESS / TECHNOLOGY

### Connected: Microsoft Office 2003 better than Office 2007

Saturday, March 29, 2008  
By David Radin

As a reviewer, I have the opportunity to see technology products early. Most of the time, I can tell fairly quickly whether the product is a winner; but some products give a good first impression that tends to fade as time goes forward.

My ultimate example is the original Motorola Razr. It looked and felt so good that I ran out and bought three for my family. But the luster faded as we used the phones and encountered considerable problems that were not obvious during the first few weeks. So occasionally, I do second looks at products -- as I'm doing today with Microsoft Office 2007.

A review of Office 2007 could be considered doomed from the start. Its predecessor, Office 2003, is one of the best products Microsoft ever created; so the bar is raised high. After a year of using the newer product, I still see some features that are better than the older version; but on the whole, I'd rather be using Office 2003.

The biggest difference is the ribbon -- a graphic bar that gives the user access to frequently used operations in almost all Office 2007 applications. (Outlook doesn't use the ribbon.) The concept is great; and it streamlines several tasks, such as being able to create mailings in MS-Word (part of the Office suite); but it falls short in general productivity. I still love the way that I can hover my cursor over a style on the ribbon to see what my text will look like once I click. But the ribbon often gets in the way of seeing the items on my page -- so sometimes defeats itself.

For users moving from Office 2003 to Office 2007, it takes a long time to find out where the various buttons have been moved, and I still have trouble finding what I need. Some are easy to find, such as Insert-Picture, because they are well labeled. But it still takes extra clicks to get there, compared with Office 2003. Others are well hidden and take thinking like a programmer to find them. Print is hidden behind the Office logo button; and if you want to type in (or even read) the properties of the document, you have to click on that logo button; then on [Prepare].

Remember when it was easy to find the [About] button on just about every application ever created? You'd simply need to click [Help]; then [About]. Not with Office 2007. Now you must click on the Office logo button; then on a lonely button labeled [Word Options] (in MS Word); then on [Resources]; then on [About]. You need to go four levels deep -- if you can even figure out where to look.

This is all made even more difficult by the lack of customization of the ribbon. I probably would have dropped back to Office 2003 long ago, if not for a product called "Classic Menu" ([www.addintools.com](http://www.addintools.com)) that lets me overlay menus such as Office 2003 in Office 2007. Still not perfect; but it makes Office 2007 much more usable.

Looking at the Office 2007 applications individually, it's easy to have your favorites. PowerPoint 2007 has some incredible enhancements over PowerPoint 2003 -- and even the ribbon makes more sense. But wishing I'd never upgraded Outlook from 2003 to 2007 has become a daily ritual. Microsoft claims it's much more secure; but I often question the reasons it has to be so slow, and why so many parts don't seem to work as I'd like.

The good news for the user is that other companies offer you alternatives to Office 2007.

David Radin is a business consultant and freelance writer. You can contact him at [www.megabyteinminute.com](http://www.megabyteinminute.com).

First published on March 29, 2008 at 12:05 am